

Study Session
City Council Chambers
January 24, 2006

Mayor Pro Tem Allen Schmid introduced Ray Paoella from the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy.

Mr. Paoella gave the background of the William O. Douglas Trail from Yakima to Mount Rainier, saying the idea came about in the last year. He said the idea has an appeal to help build our economy. He stated the idea was to link public lands with areas where people like to recreate. Mt. Rainier attracts us and we think, "Can I go there?" He noted Selah is the gateway to the Yakima River Canyon, so maybe Yakima could be the gateway to Mt. Rainier. He referred to a map showing the proposed William O. Douglas trail route running along the Naches River and proceeding all the way to Mt. Rainier National Park.

Mr. Paoella stated the William O. Douglas Trail idea is a multi-agency public/private partnership that furthers a lot of values at the same time. It promotes Economic Development/Tourism, Recreation, Historical interpretation and Cultural interpretation. Design criteria include the following:

1. connect city area to Mount Rainer in one continuous corridor that multiple uses could travel
2. interpret historical sites along the route
3. locate the trail corridor over natural and scenic areas
4. maximize use of existing public land, trails and rights-of-way.

He stated the trail corridor is over 90% complete right now.

He gave background on William O. Douglas who grew up in Yakima, wrote 30-some books and became a famous Justice of the US Supreme Court. Douglas wrote, "My love of the mountains, my interest in conservation, my longing for the wilderness--all these were lifetime concerns that were established in my boyhood in the hills around Yakima and in the mountains to the west of it." His boyhood home was located south of Safeway on 5th Avenue in Yakima. Douglas contracted polio and decided to take up hiking to overcome his disability. He would head from his house to Selah Gap. He graduated from Yakima High School and came back to teach at Davis after graduating from college.

Mr. Paoella reported that in September of 2005 about 150 people showed up at the statue of William O. Douglas in the courtyard of Davis High School to hike toward Mount Rainier. They averaged 20 miles a day for four days, and only two (Mr. Paoella and Dr. Jeff Hagen) finished the hike. He stated the Washington Trails Association has expressed interest in a statewide hike next September.

On October 20, 2005 about forty Davis High School students started their hike at the Yakima Trolley Barn. He stated Davis teachers want to work the William O. Douglas Trail into their curriculum to create interest in local history and physical fitness. Students should find inspiration in Justice Douglas' rise from poverty to national prominence, overcoming physical disability.

The trolley took students across the bridge over the Naches River to the base of the hill west of Selah Gap. The Trolley Bridge was built in 1895 and moved to its current location in 1912, so it's not surprising it is unsafe for foot traffic. He stated they are hoping to receive a YVCOG

grant to retrofit the bridge to make it a safe, multi-modal facility. He stated the Greenway Path goes under that bridge.

He noted when students started to climb the hill west of Selah Gap, they had all sorts of excuses to back out. Teachers and other adults coaxed the students to do what William O. Douglas had done. Ultimately, the students were very happy when they completed about 500 feet of climbing and made it to the top.

Students read from Douglas' works on top of the hill. Mr. Paoella noted the high school is eager to do this kind of activity on a more regular basis. He stated there is a school of thought that some students learn more effectively by moving and exercising and walking at the same time they're trying to learn. Showing a photo looking down the hill, he told of one student who remarked, "I think I get it now, climbing this hill is like life."

Mr. Paoella noted that studies have shown that recreational pathways, trails, etc. stimulate economic activity. They promote tourism, and people want to locate their homes and businesses in the area. Recreational opportunities draw people to an area.

He noted the Greenway ends at 40th now, and there is work underway to extend it to petroglyphs at the confluence of Cowiche Creek and the Naches River or toward Naches. If the Naches Rail Line is made available for an extension to the Greenway, it will immediately double the length of the Greenway system. He stated the Cowiche Canyon trail segment is three miles which will be integrated into the William O. Douglas Trail. He showed pictures of wildflowers blooming in the in shallow soil on Cowiche Mountain. Past that the Douglas Trail will cross through Snow Mountain Ranch, a 1,800 acre ranch the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy purchased with some Salmon Recovery Funding Board money as well as some money from the Bonneville Power Administration. He stated William O. Douglas would stay at Snow Mountain Ranch with his friend Elon Gilbert. Cowiche Mountain is the high point of Snow Mountain Ranch, which is now open to the public. He stated it had a sizable amount of use in December. He stated Cowiche Creek now provides twenty-three linear miles of access for salmon and steelhead since the barrier removal along the Creek.

At the end of Snow Mountain Ranch the Trail gradually transitions into the moisture zone. He showed a photo of a ponderosa pine zone where rainfall occurs in much higher numbers. He said the Trail has expanded into becoming a cross-state route. The state-wide Enhancement Advisory Committee is recommending funding of this project. This trail is actually an ancient Indian trail used for centuries, maybe even thousands of years, by the Cowlitz, Nisqually and Yakima tribes. He showed a picture of an 1881 survey map illustrating Cowlitz Pass trail heading to Snow Mountain Ranch.

He showed a picture of Kloochman Rock and Ironstone Mountain at about 6,500 feet. He stated Indian Creek also has historical significance, noting Douglas tried to learn to spear a salmon in this area. He said as you enter the William O. Douglas Wilderness you go by a meadow Douglas wrote about. Fish Lake is another area Douglas wrote about; he would walk from there to a mailbox at Bumping Lake to send his mother letters.

Mr. Paoella said they want to get information out, some teacher are encouraging student to do community service working on the trail. He passed out materials and maps.

Allen Schmid thanked Mr. Paoella, noting one of the things Selah is involved in is the Parks & Rec Comprehensive Plan, which lists the William O. Douglas Trail as a project. He stated this is an exciting opportunity for intergovernmental cooperation.

Herb Schmidt said this is imminent because if land is closed off, there will not be an opportunity for it to open later.

Mr. Paoella stated planning and growth management encourage this kind of project.

The Mayor Pro Tem adjourned the Study Session.